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INTRODUCTION OF GRADING INTO THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NEW ENGLAND

PART I

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There has never, until very recently, been any attempt in the history of education to explain the origin of the American graded system of schools. Nor is there any complete explanation of the four-year high school or its relation to the lower grades. In recent years this matter has come to the front and is a subject of controversy. Bunker,¹ in 1916, published a monograph in which he advanced evidence to show that the present American system is borrowed from Prussia. His interest in the matter is due to the fact that he sees in the present system a foreign and un-American type of organization which should be superseded by a new type of school system. Judd² takes the same position, and in a later article³ presents a part of the evidence to show how the graded system was introduced in Ohio.

Sharply opposed to Bunker and Judd are those who have cultivated the traditional type of history of education. Monroe⁴ is most emphatic in his attack on the idea that the graded system came from Prussia. Kandel⁵ repeats Monroe's statements. In his recent book Cubberley⁶ is emphatic in his assertion that the present

¹ F. F. Bunker, "Reorganization of the Public School System," *Bureau of Education Bulletin No. 8*, 1916, pp. 19-39.

² Charles H. Judd, *The Evolution of a Democratic School System*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1918.

³ Charles H. Judd, "German Influences in the Schools of Ohio," *Educational Review*, LVII (March, 1919), 205-19.

⁴ Paul Monroe, "Further Consideration of Prussia and Our Schools," *School and Society*, VII (June 15, 1918), 691-94; "Shall We Continue to Advocate Reforms by False Arguments?" *School and Society*, VIII (September 7, 1918), 290-94.

⁵ I. L. Kandel, "Prussian Schools," *New Republic* (May 25, 1918), pp. 115-16.

⁶ E. P. Cubberley, *Public Education in the United States*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1919.

system of schools is a native American product and goes out of the way to characterize the statements of Bunker and Judd as incorrect. Some quotations from Cubberley will make clear the position which he assumes:

The first step in the evolution of the present class-grade organization of our schools was the division of the school system into schools of two or more different grades, such as Primary, Intermediate, Grammar, etc.

The next step in the evolution of the graded system was the division of each school into classes. This also was begun early, certainly by 1810, and was fully accomplished in the cities by 1840. It began by the employment of assistant teachers, known as "ushers," to help the "master," and the provision of small recitation rooms, off the main large room, for their use in hearing recitations.

The third and final step in the evolution of the graded system was to build schools with smaller classrooms, or to subdivide the larger rooms; change the separate and independent and duplicate school on each floor, which had been the common plan for so long, into parts of one school organization; sort and grade the pupils, and outline the instruction by years; and the class system was at hand. This process began in the decade of the thirties, and was largely accomplished in the cities by 1850.¹

That we at this time adopted the German Volksschule, as has been recently asserted, an examination of the evidence will show was hardly the case. Not only did we not adopt its curriculum, or spirit, or method of instruction, but we did not adopt even its graded system. . . . The great thing we got from the study of Prussian schools was not a borrowing or imitation of any part or feature—our own development had been proceeding naturally and steadily toward the lines we eventually followed long before we knew of Prussian work but rather a marked stimulus to a further and faster development along lines which were already well under way.²

Somewhat intermediate between the two views referred to thus far is that of Jones³ in an article in which he reviews some of the evidence with regard to the grading of schools in Massachusetts. Jones finds a confused situation which leads him to believe that grading is in part a native product and in part a result of Prussian influence.

The whole situation can be cleared up by references to the documents contemporary with the establishment of the graded system. This paper brings together some of these documents.

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 229-30.

² *Ibid.*, p. 282.

³ Arthur J. Jones, "Are Our Schools Prussian in Origin?" *Educational Review*, LVI (November, 1918), 271-94.

By way of introduction it may be pointed out that the rise of the graded school of the type which we know today took place very rapidly during the decades between 1830 and 1860. Before the movement began, district schools were the typical schools of the country. The district schools were not unlike the one-room country school of our own day, except that they lacked supervision from the state and had no examples of town graded schools to help them in classifying their pupils and organizing their curricula.

During the early years of the movement toward the present grading system there arose, especially in Massachusetts, a type of school which was partially graded. This was the union school. It was the first step toward consolidating the districts into a large unit, as over against the practice of breaking up the districts into smaller units, each with its own separate school. This union-school plan made it possible to separate the younger children from the older and place them in separate schools. The schools for the younger children were called the primary schools while those for the older were called grammar schools. In Boston the grammar schools were organized on what was known as the double-headed plan. It is important that this type of school be clearly understood or confusion will arise.

In the first place, the term "grade" as applied to these schools referred to separate schools: namely, the primary school was the first grade; the grammar school was the second grade; and the Latin grammar school or English high school was the third grade. In the second place, the internal organization of the schools was entirely different from the grading we know today. For example, let us take the Boston grammar schools, which embraced the ages from seven to fourteen years for boys and from seven to sixteen years for girls and examine their organization.

Each grammar school had two departments, called the reading and writing departments. Each of these departments had its own rooms and its own set of studies. Each department had its own master and corps of assistants and the pupils attended each department in turn. Both had a large room where all the pupils were seated for study, supervision, and general instruction under the head master. Off to the side of the large room were small recitation

rooms where the pupils retired in classes for the recitations to the assistants. The program of studies was divided not horizontally by grades but vertically by subjects.¹

These partially graded schools abounded with personal rivalry and emulation. This was in exact parallel to the spirit of the district school where the spelling bee and the mathematical prodigy, which tested the prowess of each new teacher, were a part of the regular program of the school. Such a spirit of rivalry was made possible largely by the methods of individual instruction and vertical organization of the curriculum then in use. In 1841 the Boston school committee in its annual report complained of the effects of this spirit of emulation, stating that "the interests of the rank and file are somewhat neglected for the sake of a few leaders," which was, they thought, the "inevitable result of schools so large as ours, and of that system of emulation and high-pressure principle on which they are managed, and which, your committee would respectfully suggest, is carried quite too far."²

This was the condition of the internal organization of the double-headed grammar schools of Boston until 1848 when the Quincy School was constructed. Outside of the double-headed feature the same internal organization existed in all the union schools until the new system of grading was introduced.

Ultimately the district school, the union school, and the Boston double-headed grammar school were all superseded by the graded school of the present type. The union school, furthermore, can be shown to be a first attempt to accomplish an imitation of the European system, and the transition from the union grammar school and the double-headed grammar school to the graded school can be shown to be a radical move. That it was something new is clearly evidenced by the fact that it was most vigorously resisted by many American schoolmasters.

The following exposition will have to deal with various states and personalities. In order to keep the several lines of evidence clear, the following outline will be followed.

¹ J. D. Philbrick, *Twenty-ninth Semiannual Report*, September, 1874, pp. 10-12.

² *Abstract of the Massachusetts School Returns*, Boston, 1841-42, p. 2.

First, it will be shown that in Ohio the graded system came directly from Prussia and superseded the district school. The case here has no complications. Secondly, it will be shown that there is direct connection between Barnard's work in Connecticut and that of the Ohio group. Thirdly, it will be shown that the early Massachusetts changes were prompted by the Prussian influences. Fourthly, it will be shown by tracing the movements and writings of Horace Mann and George B. Emerson that there is a direct connection between their efforts and those of the Ohio group, and that the final step taken in the Quincy School represents an emphatic change from the early Massachusetts experiment to a pure Prussian form of grading. Fifthly, it will be shown that the Quincy School, which is the first clear Massachusetts example of a graded school, carried over directly to St. Louis and Connecticut.

Each of these lines of argument will be supported by references to documents. They make a perfectly clear case for the statement that not alone in one part of the United States but in all the leading centers of educational reform it was the Prussian example which operated to determine the form of present school organization in the elementary-school system of America.

Let us turn now to the first part of the discussion. The center from which issued most of the great reforms in Ohio was the Western Literary Institute, a strong and progressive organization of the friends of education in the city of Cincinnati. The first superintendent of public schools in Ohio, Mr. Lewis, was a member of this group and found in the group his strongest supporters. It was this group which co-operated with Stowe in securing attention for his reports on Prussian schools. Stowe's famous *Report on Elementary Instruction in Europe* was submitted to the thirty-sixth general assembly (1837) in Ohio and was ordered published by them and a copy sent to every school district in the state. Later the report was republished and extensively circulated by the legislatures of Michigan, North Carolina, Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts.

In the transactions of the seventh annual meeting of the Institute, published in 1838, Mr. Stowe reported on the details of the Prussian schools in part as follows:

The whole course comprises eight years, and includes children from the ages of 6 till 14; and it is divided into four parts of two years each. It is a first principle that the children be well accommodated as to house and furniture. The school-room must be well constructed, the seats convenient, and the scholars made comfortable, and kept interested. The younger pupils are kept at school but four hours in the day—two in the morning and two in the evening, with a recess at the close of each hour. The older, six hours broken by recesses as often as is necessary. Most of the school-houses have a bathing place, a garden, and a mechanics' shop attached to them to promote the cleanliness and health of the children, and to aid in mechanical and agricultural instruction. It will be seen by the schedule which follows, that a vast amount of instruction is given during these eight years—and lest it should seem that so many branches must necessarily be but partially taught, I will say at the outset, that the industry, skill, and energy of teachers regularly trained to their business, and depending entirely upon it; the modes of teaching; the habit of always finishing whatever is begun; the perfect method which is preserved; the entire punctuality and regularity of attendance on the part of the scholars; and other things of this kind, facilitate a rapidity and exactness of acquisition and discipline which may well seem incredible to those who have never witnessed it.¹

This report was made in October, 1837. (We find that that part of Stowe's report which contained the above extract was published in the *Connecticut Common School Journal*, edited by Barnard, in 1839, prior to Stowe's trip to Hartford, which will be discussed later.)

Following this description of the Prussian system of grading we find the following statements in the Cincinnati city reports for June, 1838, and June, 1839:

Many of the common schools have, within the last year, been graded and the males and females placed in separate compartments, under appropriate teachers. The results of this plan have been so favorable, that the Trustees would recommend the same measure to be carried out in those schools where the males and females are collected together in the same room.²

The system of grading or classing the pupils heretofore adopted has been more fully carried into effect in all schools, and its benefits more generally felt and approved. It tends to lighten the labors of the teachers, to promote good order in the schools, and to secure to the pupils a more certain and rapid advancement in their studies. A proper classification of those pupils may hereafter be called for.³

¹ *Transaction of the Seventh Annual Meeting of the Western Literary Institute and College of Professional Teachers*. Cincinnati, 1838, p. 204.

² *Annual Report of the Trustees and Visitors of the Common Schools of Cincinnati*, 1838, p. 3.

³ *Ibid*, 1839, p. 4.

An examination of the *Annual Report* for 1848, which describes the course of study for the new graded school,¹ shows that the new scheme was closely patterned after the Prussian example as championed by Stowe.

Thus we see that during the year 1838, the year following the publication of Stowe's report, the new graded school had been adopted in Cincinnati, superseding the district school. Before the close of the year 1840 two occurrences show how closely connected were the purposes of the leading educators of the New England states and Ohio. We shall consider the first incident in the second part of this discussion and touch on the other briefly at this point.

During the spring of 1840 Horace Mann, accompanied by his wife, took a trip west for his health. On April 11 they visited in the home of Mr. Nathan Guilford, the author of some of the early Ohio school laws. Mr. Guilford lived in Cincinnati, and extracts from Mr. Mann's diary show that they spent some time in the city.²

This was in April, 1840, and it was on March 7, 1838, that the new Ohio school law was passed repealing all previous laws,³ and it was in 1838 that the new graded school had been adopted in Cincinnati. Here then was Horace Mann, the secretary of the new Board of Education in Massachusetts, a visitor in Cincinnati, discussing school affairs less than two years after the changes in the Ohio system had been effected and gradation adopted in Cincinnati.

We will turn now to the other link which connected the reorganization movement in Ohio with that in New England. On August 28, 1839, the State Common School Convention opened at Hartford, Connecticut. Among the prominent educators present were Professor Calvin E. Stowe, of Ohio; A. H. Everett, Thomas Cushing, and George B. Emerson, of Boston; and Henry Barnard, of Hartford. Professor Stowe, fresh from his successes in Cincinnati and Ohio, was present at the request of the committee on

¹ *Annual Report of the Trustees and Visitors of the Common Schools of Cincinnati*, 1848.

² Mrs. Mary Tyler Mann, *Life of Horace Mann*, p. 127. Boston: Walker, Fuller & Co., 1865.

³ *Ohio Laws*, XXXVI, 21.

arrangements to lecture on the schools of Cincinnati. That the leading subject for discussion at the convention was gradation of schools is shown from the following extracts taken from the proceedings of the convention as published in the *Connecticut Common School Journal* for September, 1839:

On motion of Gen. Johnson, it was voted to assign 2½ P.M. to a lecture from Prof. Stowe and 4½ P.M. to a lecture from Mr Cushing. . . .

Prof. Stowe, at the request of the Committee, gave an account of the history and condition of the public schools of Cincinnati, which he considered equal to those of any large city in the country.

Afternoon.—Prof. Stowe delivered a lecture on “the necessity of increased efforts in the United States, to sustain and extend the advantages of Common School education.” After a recess of 15 minutes Mr. Thomas Cushing, Jr., of Boston, delivered a lecture on the “division of labor as applied to teaching.”

After the lecture Mr. Barnard presented some views on the importance of a gradation of schools, especially in the populous districts, and recommended strongly to those districts as were conveniently located for this purpose, to associate and form a union district, so that the younger children of each could be taught where they are now under a female teacher, and the older scholars of the uniting districts be placed in a Union school.

Evening.— . . .

Mr. Emerson, of Boston, followed with a more particular account of the public schools of Boston.

They consist of three grades—*Primary Schools* for children from four to seven years of age. . . . *Grammar and Writing schools* are the *second* in order. Children are admitted at the age of seven years, who can read easy prose, and continue in them if boys, until they have arrived at fourteen years of age—if girls, until they are sixteen. . . . The Latin Grammar School and the English High School constitute the third grade.

Thursday, August 29.—The question respecting Common Schools in cities, etc., was resumed and discussed by the Rev. Dr. Field, T. S. Perkins, Esq., N. Landon, L. Kennedy, Esq., of Hartford; Rev. Mr. Bacon, W. G. W. Fitzgerald and Mr. Lines, of New Haven; Rev. Mr. Burgess, Prof. Stowe, and Mr. Barnard. In the course of the discussion, the necessity of a gradation of schools, of more liberal appropriation of money to their support, of higher moral instruction, of the Lancasterian system, of better qualified teachers, of Teacher’s Seminaries, were severally dwelt upon. . . .

Thursday evening.—Rev. Mr. Burgess introduced the following resolution, to embody the sense of the Convention on the subject which had occupied so much of its deliberations, and which was adopted unanimously:

Resolved, That in the judgment of this Convention, it is of primary importance for the improvement of the public schools in our cities and populous villages that in all such places, the schools shall be so graduated as to form a system which shall afford to all children in the community, not only the first elements of knowledge, but, so far as may be possible, the best education which their age, leisure and intellectual powers will qualify them to receive.¹

The significance of Stowe's trip to Hartford at this time cannot be overemphasized. It was no small matter for a person to travel from Cincinnati to Hartford in those days of poor transportation. Certainly it was unusual for a westerner to come to New England, by request, and describe what he considered to be equal to the best city school system in the country. Cincinnati, it was pointed out above, had but a few months previous to the convention adopted and passed favorably on the new scheme of gradation. That this was stressed by Stowe and Barnard is evident.

At the same convention the Boston system of graded schools, not gradation within the schools, was reported on by Emerson. These have already been described in this article, and later in the fourth part of the discussion it will be shown that within six months after the convention Emerson described a *new system of gradation* in which no mention is made of Boston as an example, but in which the influence of Stowe is evident.

What was the immediate effect of this convention in Connecticut?

In the November issue of the *Connecticut Common School Journal* for 1839, a little more than two months after the meeting, Barnard in an editorial under the caption "What Can Be Done to Improve the Common Schools This Winter?" states that the schools could be improved by establishing a gradation of schools and classification of scholars, and that many of the districts of the state had already decided to adopt that course.²

The following May, 1840, less than nine months after the convention, Barnard in his *Second Annual Report* to the Board described the new system of grading at more length as follows:

Many of the evils universally complained of and which result from crowding children of every age and both sexes in the whole course of common school instruction . . . can be obviated . . . by a gradation of schools. The ele-

¹ *Connecticut Common School Journal*, II, 35-36.

² *Ibid.*, p. 53.

ments of such a gradation may be found in the high schools, union schools and district schools now recognized by law. The studies appropriate to each should be defined and different grades of qualification in teachers appropriate to each class of schools should be established. Such a gradation will be found to exist in the best systems of public instruction, at home and abroad, and without it, I do not see how thorough instruction can be given in even the lower branches, much less, how the higher and more practical studies can be made common to the children of the poor and the rich. In cities of the State, especially, the want of such a gradation is most evident and its introduction is immediately practicable.¹

Thus we find several districts in Connecticut deciding to adopt gradation within two months after the convention at which Stowe described the Cincinnati system as one of the best, if not the best, in the country. Also we find Barnard citing such a system of gradation to prevail in the best systems of public instruction both at home and abroad. Another interesting point should be noted in the foregoing quotation, namely, that only the elements of such a gradation were to be found in the union schools.

It should be remembered that Barnard had visited Germany in 1836, three years previous to the convention, and while there had made an extensive study of the school system. Furthermore, as editor of the *Connecticut Common School Journal* he had printed therein, during the years 1838 and 1840, copious extracts from Cousin's report, Stowe's report, and Bache's report. Hence, Connecticut had in Henry Barnard an ardent champion of Prussian schools.

Before tracing the influence of the Hartford meeting on Massachusetts it is important that we bring the Massachusetts situation up to the time of the convention. This leads us then to the third part of this discussion, in which it will be shown that the early Massachusetts changes were prompted by Prussian influences.

Prior to 1830 public education in Massachusetts had degenerated into a routine full of defects and evils. The district school with its age limits of four to twenty-one years was in full sway. All were under local authority. Then came the change. The reorganization that was accomplished during the next two decades was as unprecedented as it was rapid.

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 217-18.

The first step toward reorganization consisted in the establishment of the American Institute of Instruction in Boston in 1830. Among the first men to be associated with this organization were W. C. Woodbridge and Charles Brooks, both recent visitors in Germany. The former lectured and wrote concerning the Prussian schools¹ and with the assistance of Dr. Alcott endeavored to establish a miniature Fellenberg school near Hartford, Connecticut.²

Charles Brooks traveled widely and lectured on the Prussian normal schools in his efforts toward having them established in Massachusetts, and was rewarded by seeing the thing accomplished in 1838.

Hence, it was with readiness that these New Englanders received the famous report of M. Victor Cousin entitled *Report of the State of Public Instruction in Prussia*, made to the French minister of public instruction, translated into English by Mrs. Sarah Austin, and published in New York in 1835.

The efforts of Woodbridge and Brooks followed by the appearance of Cousin's report will serve as an explanation of the action taken by the American Institute of Instruction which resulted in sending two "Memorials" to the state legislature. The first was submitted in 1836 and advocated the establishment of state normal schools. The second was sent the following year and advocated the establishment of a state superintendent of public instruction, even going so far as to outline the new officer's duties in case the legislature decided to adopt the plan submitted. These two "Memorials" were written by George B. Emerson, and the following quotation from the latter will suffice to show to what extent the Prussian practice, as described in Cousin's and other reports, influenced the writer:

5. He [the Superintendent] could reduce to shape and symmetry, the now disjointed materials of what might be a beautiful system. Much has been said of our system of schools. But it is evident there is little of system about them.

6. He could collect, and present to the legislature, the experience of other states and foreign countries, on subjects interesting to the common schools.

¹ *American Annals of Education and Instruction for the Year 1833* (Boston), p. 550.

² *American Journal of Education*, IV (Hartford, 1858), 642.

Several of the states of Germany have, with wise policy, put into operation systems for complete education of all their inhabitants. The government of France is, at this moment, earnestly engaged in the work. . . .

To show that they do not give undue prominence to this office, they beg leave to refer to the example of Prussia, France, and several others of the most enlightened governments of Europe, in which the charge of public instruction constitutes a separate department, equal in rank and consequence, to any other whatever. . . . Even if they were our enemies it would still be wise in us to borrow from them an institution which promised to be as useful among us as it showed itself among them.¹

These two "Memorials" paved the way for the establishment of the board of education and the first state normal school by the acts of 1837 and 1838. However, another influence, stronger than the American Institute of Instruction, had to be brought to bear on the legislature before it passed these acts. This force had for its backing that all-important aid to reform—money. The source of this influence was centered in Mr. Edmund Dwight, of Boston. Speaking of his services to education in Massachusetts, Mr. Sears in the *Thirteenth Annual Report of the Secretary of the Board* says:

It was through his (Dwight's) exertions, perhaps, more than any other individual that this board was established, and through his liberality, more than that of all others, that it was able to prosecute the system of measures which resulted in whatever of success it has achieved.²

What was the influence that led this business man of Boston to give not only of his time but also of his money to the cause of public education? This question is answered in the following extracts from a "Memoir of Edmund Dwight" by Francis Bowen:

In 1835, through the agency of Mr. James S. Wadsworth, of New York, Mrs. Austin's translation of M. Cousin's celebrated *Report of the State of Public Instruction in Prussia*, was republished in this country, in a large edition, and extensively circulated. This was a judicious and timely step, as the work contained the outlines, and even the minute details, of the most elaborate and complete system of common schools which had yet been devised in the civilized world. . . .

Mr. Dwight's attention had been previously directed to the subject, probably, in part . . . but the perusal of this Report served to inspire and

¹ *American Journal of Education*, V, 655-56.

² B. Sears, *Thirteenth Annual Report of the Secretary of the Board, Together with the Report of the Board*, 1849, p. 14.

harmonize his designs. Henceforward, he gave his whole energies to the work; it became one of the leading purposes of his life. His house became a center of meeting and consultation upon the enterprise, and for many years, hardly one important step was taken in relation to it but with his advice, or on his urgency. . . . The plan devised by the little volunteer council of which Mr. Dwight was the center was carried into effect by the school law of 1837, passed by the legislature under the active patronage and influence of Mr. Edward Everett, then Governor of the State.¹

The article goes on to say that Dwight was the means of securing the services of Horace Mann as secretary of the board by personally increasing the compensation allowed to him by the state; that Dwight gave \$10,000 on condition that the state appropriate a similar amount for the establishment of the first normal school; and that on numerous other occasions he contributed important pecuniary aid in carrying forward the designs of the board and of its secretary.

Thus we see this Boston business man, after reading Cousin's report, giving his "whole energies to the work," gathering around him a group of men such as Brooks and Mann, giving his house, his time, and his money to the cause of reorganizing the common schools of Massachusetts.

[To be concluded]

¹ Francis Bowen, "Memoir of Edmund Dwight," *American Journal of Education* IV (1858), 14-15.